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The madwoman and the muse: poetry and prose

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Iowa State University

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The madwoman and the muse

poetry and prose

by

Amy Mooney

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Department: English
Major: English (Creative Writing)

Approved:

Members of the Committee

In Charge of Major Work

For the Major Department

For the Graduate College

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1991

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SECTION I: POETRY

The Muse

Sigh. (A Chest Rises Then Falls Again)

Even though summer is over,
blow-up, multicolored
beachballs are sold
year round in K-Mart.
Even though the Register
leaves ink on my fingers,
it tells me how the stars
are properly aligned
to bring love into my life.
Even though my mother
says Quaker Oatmeal must
start a day, I can still have
chocolate fudge Pop-Tarts and
Diet Pepsi for breakfast.
Even though the moon
makes me bleed, I know
its light will give field mice
pleasant dreams of cheese
and give the night's hand
something to grasp.
Even though in autumn,
the Iowa trees are given
nothing to put on, they do
the fox trot with the wind
without ever stopping to shiver.
Even though my asparagus
is painted with pesticides,
I can get rid of them--
sort of--by scrubbing with
lemon-fresh Joy and water.
Even though a man isn't
holding my hand, I can have
babies whenever I choose
just because I am a woman.
Even though the Catholic
church and I are fighting,
baptizing myself in the rain
will make me go to heaven.

And even though a hole
has been eaten in the sky
by hungry technology, the
earth still breathes with me.

Just Visiting this Planet or Wearing Buttons is Not Enough

Think Globally Act Locally

Save the Coast! Support Ocean Sanctuary

Keep Your Laws Off My Body

Women Against Nukes
Choice

Free South Africa End Apartheid!

MEN CAN STOP RAPE

"Whatever you do may seem insignificant, but it is most important that you do it"--Gandhi
World Peace

Women Unite Take Back The Night

Boycott Coke!

I Helped Save the Whales

Peace is back by popular demand

Solar Energy is Harmful to Oil Companies and other living conglomerates
Greenpeace

HOMOPHOBIA IS A SOCIAL DISEASE

ERA

"You have touched a woman, you have struck a rock"

Peace and Justice

Child Care Not Warfare

Nuclear Free Seas

Silence is Complicity

Arms are for hugging

Give Back The Earth

"...as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country.
As a woman my country is the whole world."--Virginia Woolf

Peace is disarming

Never another Hanger

Self Determination For All People

Lets give our children a world without war

Racism is a social disease

Rainbow Warrior

Anonymous was a woman

Better ACTIVE today than RADIOACTIVE tomorrow

Boycott Tunal
WOMEN HOLD UP HALF THE SKY
ABOLISH APARTHEID SANCTIONS NOW

Housing is a right--not a privilege

69 cents

TEACH PEACE

Clean Water Now!

Save the People

Sometimes the Earth Gets Heavy Holding It Up Like That

Today I took back \$5.55 cents
worth of cans back to the redemption
center took my separated garbage
--plastic, batteries, metal, glass, paper--
back to the recycling center
went to the supermarket
and didn't buy things with
excess packaging, didn't use
plastic bags for my fruits
and vegetables, just threw
them all in the cart together,
didn't buy any products
from Ralston Purina,
Coca-Cola, Nestle, or any
other non-politically correct item,
had them bag my groceries in the
cloth bags I brought and of course,
walked to all these places.
Then on the way home some guy
drove by me going about 75 and threw
a pop can and candy bar wrapper
(Coke and Nestle's Crunch)
out the window and all I saw
was his bumper sticker that said
"Greenpeace" and I just stood
there shaking my head and
staring at the wrapper blowing
down the road and the can rolling
to the side of the street
I needed to yell, or point it out to him
but by then he was long gone
spewing CO₂ into the sky
completely unaware of what he
had done, totally oblivious
to the fact that I picked up his garbage,
took it home like some great prize,
and sorted it into cans and paper.

Fine. I said it's fine. Everthing here is fine.
We don't mind--it's so fine.

We can ALL choose
and we refuse
to eat tuna
use styrofoam
drink Coke
do crack
hate and
discriminate
to beat up others
for their mate
date rape
to buy Guess
grapes
Exxon
Dominoes
and Scrimshaw.
We all use paper
no plastic please
I get as much money
as a man
69 cents was never grand.
The night is safe
and women can walk alone
self-determination
we all condone.
Toxic waste
is not dumped
with haste
our waters are clean
and I mean,
nuclear free
those ships of the sea.
Peace in the Middle East
we helped out at least.
We all know
that power over
is different when you're under.
Mandela is out
people all doubt

that Quayle is capable
there is a staple
of food for the Third World
Donald Trump builds
public housing
and Bush doesn't lie.
Our lungs
are not a landfill anymore
all along the shore
there are no oil spills.
Dioxon poisoning
and ocean strip mining
are prevented.
Eating disorders
do not exist
we insist
there be no
agism
classism
sexism
racism.
We banned
photoplankton blooms
chlorofluorocarbons
petachlorophenol
racial slurs
and buying furs.
The ozone hole is gone
and acid rain
doesn't water the lawn.
We saved the dolphins
the Beluga whales
the roos
the sea turtles
the seals
the polar bear
the panda bear
the wolf
the crocodile
the spotted owl
the rainforest
the planet.

We saved the people.
And we ALL
are fine.
F - I - N - E.
Fine.

My Life in a Nut Shell

Crazy.
 I think I am going
 Crazy.
 Too many people
 telling me
 I'm Crazy.
 Make me believe
 I'm Crazy.
 People talking
 about those
 Crazy
 poets.
 Adrienne Rich
 says
 poems are like
 dreams,
 in them
 you put
 what you
 don't know
 you know.
 So,
 by writing
 this poem,
 I must not be
 Crazy.
 I mean,
 if I say I'm
 not
 Crazy.
 Unless,
 of course,
 she too,
 is
 Crazy

Over Chicken Parmesan With Amy Clampitt

Amy Clampitt said
she never wrote any
poems until late
in her life because
she was never sure
if what she had to say
was right and I
wondered when
she knew it was
finally right and
how much she
could have told
us if someone
had just told her she
was right all along
or if she knew
she WAS right
but no one would
let her say it.

I think there is
no woman writer
who can say that
she knew she was
right all along
because even if
we started out
thinking we were
they tell us we're not
and now we can
learn a bit earlier
than Amy but only
if we are lucky
enough to have
someone tell us
we really are right
and I am telling you
now WE ARE RIGHT.

The Original Sin



EVE WAS FRAMED
EVE WAS FRAMED EVE
WAS FRAMED EVE WAS
FRAMED EVE WAS FR
AMED EVE WAS FRAM
ED EVE WAS FRAMED
EVE WAS FRAMED EVE
WAS FRAMED EVE WAS FR
AMED EVE WAS FRAMED
EVE WAS FRAMED EVE
WAS FRAMED EVE

This Poem Is For The Heads Of Women
Who Have Lost Their Bodies.

Cut off her head,
paste her up
and sell it...
cologne, athletic wear, ice cream, jeans, and cars.
Forbid her to think--
no head,
no thought.
Enclose her
in a magazine ad.
Even though blood should be spurting
from her neck
and from the staples in her navel,
she feels no pain--
or thinks
she has no pain.
Without a head, how does she know
if this is
pain?
Decapitated women,
with bodies
a goddess never had,
selling--
out.
The mind,
of mind and body
is only body.
Is this really
what Darwin meant by
survival of the fittest?

Everyday I Walk by It* and Think of Her and the Misguided Angel

*The Left-Sided Angel statue
in front of the Iowa State University Library

She comes to me
with one eye
a purple fruit
of anger and
the other eye red
with blood veins
of pain and
tears of coping
rolling down her
swollen cheeks.
She pushes up
her sleeves
revealing the
former resting
places of
hot grease and
cigarette butts.
She says
her belly isn't blue
anymore but
when she sits
she winces.
Her legs show
the map of
her life lately
rivers of scars
connecting
continents
of scabs.
She says she
knows she has
a guardian angel
out there or
else she would
be dead now.

Wishing You Were in the Other Half

*Over 1/2 of the women on college campuses have eating disorders

- I. Driving by I see you,
 as I wish you could see yourself.
 Running on the side of the world,
 the wind carrying you from behind.
 You are emaciated, fragile.
 Bones piercing through your black tights,
 a Halloween skeleton with shoes--
 New Balance 690's with reflector tape.
 I wonder why your bones don't crack
 each time your feet push the pavement.
 You don't look up
 or out
 only down
 at your own anorectic legs.
- II. Pulling on her black
 spandex tights over
 fat thighs, gut hanging out
 from over two hundred
 calories in one day.
 "Get it off me...
 Get it off me".
 Grabs her New Balance
 690's, paid \$72.92 so she
 wouldn't hurt herself,
 ties them tight,
 packaging her feet.
 Pounds her fist
 into her stomach,
 her life,
 and GOES.
 Feeling her muscles
 scrape over bones,
 "Get it off me...
 Get it off me,"
 she sings to the
 rhythm of her pace.

If This Doesn't Make You Feel Uncomfortable, It Should.

I. Woman and self confidence; This is Not a Seminar

It is clear to me
that self confidence
sleeps in the minds
of white men.
I throw up my food
because it makes
me feel whole.
I do it
because
I
can.

II. One of Half Who Cannot Speak

I swallow
my thoughts
until my stomach
pulsates.
Voices inside,
call out.
I purge
the eaten words
drinking lots of liquids
to make them
come up and out
easily.

III. Yelling Into the Grand Canyon When I Am Still In Iowa

I
did not
cup my hands
around my
mouth
and yell
my own name,
but
the echo
in the toilet
keeps calling
it out.

Lunch

*"That imbruted soul and bloated body, with hardly any
features left, a mass of horrible corruption now.*

That lump of living flesh was once a woman"

--Fraser Harrison

I fear

this is what they will write about me

years from now

or tomorrow.

I fear

they will write it

about my daughter.

For a woman, the soul /S

the body,

and mine is mutilated--

blown up from the

inside out and the outside in.

Is it what I'm not telling you

or what you are telling me

that leaves me here

with my guts, visions, and creativity

held on a spoon

by someone or something

I cannot see.

I do not understand how

to make this hunger

which is against me,

turn into something

I will fight to have.

The Problem that Has No Name, Now Has a Name, But the Name Is
 Not Really the Name, Because It Still Really Has No Name
 (Betty Friedan Will Understand.)

What is this so deep
 inside
 all these women
 that makes us reach
 so deep inside
 our own throats
 searching to pull out
 what makes us ache?
 If we could
 we'd submerge ourselves
 in ourselves,
 down
 through our esophagus,
 beyond our hearts
 into our stomach
 where we could just pull
 it
 out.
 But instead we
 gag
 and can't get beyond
 the back of our throats,
 as they keep telling us
 it's not really there,
 it's not really there.
 And we'll keep going on like this
 trying to get it out
 --the only way we know how--
 until they believe
 what we keep telling them,
 it
 is
 There.

Womyn & the Moon

You steal
all the stars
while our eyes are
blinded by the tolerance we
grew. We knew the moon
was holding our existence.
Its essence recharges our
hopes of new mornings
and old dreams. The moon
sings to blossoms of wormy
apples, telling us appearance
means nothing to the tastes
of desire. The moon smiles
at magic crystals hidden in
womyn's eyes. The moon shares
its light with the dreams of small
girls sleeping under darkness.
The moon giggles the moment
wet cement sucks an imprint
of a womyn's name, an almost
permanent identity in this world.
The moon's stained glass ideas
are cooked in copper. Creative
energy is frozen in rules made
by the ones with stars in
their pockets. The moon is
ours. You can have the stars
that shoot from the implanted
clouds at dusk. The moon
can never be held in hands
as small and greedy
as yours.

The View From Under The Street or
After a Meeting With the Dean

—for the Women's Studies Committee

It's always us,
there,
at the bottom
pushing out
a new blade of grass,
a violet
an earthworm--
providing just enough
growth,
to let them know
it is time to
spread the fertilizer,
again.
We sigh
as we dig our way back
from the China
they promised us.
Covered with the
black earth,
we are more determined
than ever
to prove that
their asphalt
can never be permanent
in this world
because
it is that
which is underneath,
which keeps us all
alive.

What They Know About the Darkness

Everyday miners
left the light of day
to work in unknown darkness
taking with them
a yellow canary
in a simple wire cage.
They mined until
her song was suffocated
by gases of the mine.

Everynight when I
am about to fall
between the moment
of waking and dreaming,
knowing and ignoring,
yellow canaries fly under my eyelids
startling me back,
making me fall ten stories
without leaving my bed.

Are You Really You--I mean REALLY?

She was she
 he was he
 and now
 he and she
 can just be.
 Cause I am I
 me is me
 don't you see
 where we be?
 Deedle dee
 doodle da,
 what you see
 is just me.
 Defined
 provided
 delighted
 excited--
 all the time
 inside
 outside
 from over there
 from under here
 always
 always
 always
 me.

My Brother and I Can Spend Forever Doing Nothing

We discovered
the rain is more beautiful
if Father just washed the car.
I laugh as your
homemade dimple
appears and
I promise I won't mess up
your baseball cards.

We agree we must be
the coolest people
alive
then implant ourselves
in the concrete curb as
the wet world goes by on
a merry-go-round.

Rain dots our exclusive vision
as we talk of
chocolate ice cream
Allen Ginsberg and
the Mets
in one breath.

We dance a polka
in the puddles,
sing an Irish drinking song,
and fling mud to the muses,
leopardizing
our white T-shirts.

I tell you the
poem I wrote and
you tell me
the painting you made.
Rain streaks the canvas sky
and in the frame
there is only us.

What I Anticipate With the Moon
Is When Dreams Move to Reality So Smoothly.

The moon in crescent drifts across afternoon
daylight searching for the place in darkness
she knows will welcome her,
where dusk takes its final breath in
and exhales constellations
surrounding her in the familiar of evening,
letting her surface drink whatever
leftover light she may find.

I wander through days gluttonous,
starving to slip out of obligations
and into the resonance of dreams.
Late afternoon naps with him
are what I do best--going in with light,
my head on the slope of his chest,
my hands holding the thick of his shoulder;
it has become as easy as coming out in dark,
when I wake with his lips
on the back of my neck and
his hand in the curve of my hip.

The Repercussions of Crickets and Love

I feel your warm
breath on my neck
chest sticking to
my back one
hand on the
soft of my belly
and the other
lost in my wild
hair. In the
moonlight we
cannot see, there
are no crickets
calling to one
another. I tell
you about my
childhood in Iowa--
pulling on my boots
and screaming,
my mother running
to the back porch
stroking my hair,
wiping the smashed
cricket from my sock
and the tears from
my eyes, warning me
to always shake
my boots before I
put them on--
Laughing, you try
to imagine me
as a child, and tell
me not to worry
because there are
no crickets in Alaska.
You fidget and roll
over on to your back,
laying wide open

waiting for me
to fit my body
to yours. My head
fits on your chest
arms slide around
you knees drawn
up against your legs
toes holding tight
to your ankles.
I lean up and take
your breath into
my mouth and
for a moment
there are no lines
of space or spheres
of flesh and we
cannot tell where
one body ends
and the other begins.
You finally drift off
to sleep and I try
to imagine the sound
of crickets singing
but can't. Instead,
I think about
how near the
end of summer
is and how I will
have to walk away,
how I will have
to find somewhere
to go back to.

September evening in Iowa &

jazz is making love
to the stars,
each note's tongue
tasting the slope
of the neck, the
slant of the tips, the
slick of the lips, the
shape of the hips, the
fingers of song slide
over a sweet world
of flesh like water,
rolling waves of pleasure
lingering in bellies,
down thighs,
& up spines,
bodies curl
& undulate,
dissolving in dreams
& melting in moonlight.
A saxophone's voice
blows blues to a lover
which is about to cast
itself on me, with its
eyes closed
& mine open wide
the star leaps,
floating on a melody
to the earth,
to the ground,
to the grass,
where I am
waiting,
holding the night,
the moonlight,
the jazz,
& the wish
for you to be
this star.